

Report on Public Meeting about the Future of Morvern's Forests - March 6th, Lochaline Hall

Attending : Freda Beston, John Beston, Sam Firth, Alasdair Firth, Bonnie Mealand, Dave Mealand, Lilia, Veronique, Isabel Isherwood, Clare Holohan, Miles Welsh, Malcolm MacNeil, Kay Burges, Alistair Schoolar, Annie Tordoff, Mike Tordoff

The community consultation meeting on Sunday went well. The level of debate and engagement was refreshing and the general consensus was positive. There was a particular emphasis on job creation, specifically with the retention of young people in mind - not just in terms of forestry but other woodland related jobs and enterprises. People also felt strongly about more sustainable woodland and diverse types of forestry thinking further ahead than the next 30-40 years. Access to the woods and the diversification of uses of the woodland were also mentioned.

Everyone agreed the community should have more involvement in the management of the woodland on Morvern and everyone bar one person supported in principle the idea of purchasing more woodland on Morvern.

Both at the consultation meeting and from talking more widely to different members of the community (particularly those that have grown up here) people have made the point that we should equally consider pursuing the purchase of woodland from local estates such as Killundine Estate and Drimnin. This is reflected in at least one of the letters we have received. Some people felt we should be pursuing the land that is not already in public ownership.

One Lochaline resident felt strongly we should prioritise woodland and land in and around the village of Lochaline so that there is a sense of the villagers "owning their own patch".

Other comments from drop in members:

Favouring local people for employment

Paths & Accessibility

Mountain bike trails

Wildlife haven

No clear fell sites

Keeping forest land as forest.

Common grazings available if crofts are being developed

Something needs to change in Morvern to sustain the current school roll in Lochaline as numbers will drop rapidly in the next few years.

By the end of the meeting those remaining agreed that the next steps should be:

- 1) To gather more information about woodlands of Morvern:
i.e. their current use, their financial value and viability.
- 2) Contact the forestry commission about which land might be available
- 3) Register interest in any land which might be of benefit to the community
- 4) Form a steering group.

Volunteers for the steering group so far are: Angus Robertson, Clare Holohan, Alasdair Firth, John Hodgson, Claire Manthorpe, Donald Kennedy, Bonnie Mealand, Sam Firth, Martin Gale, Mike Foulis, Veronique Walraven, Jim Manthorpe, Miles Welsh (but we are open to all)

Letters of support were received from:

Roderick and Amanda James, Sally Semple, Jim Manthorpe, Nicola Jones, Bob Brown

Facebook support (on Lochaline page and MCW page):

Faith Finnigran, Anita Boylan, Kirsty MacIntyre, Morag Wilson, Robert Nimmo Brown

Claire Munro (Community Land Scotland), Keith Threadgal, Gary Servant (Upland Ecology & Invergarrie Community Woodland), Alan Crawford (Woodland Trust)
Jessica Heriot

Negative feedback from:

James Burns - (letter) & Raymond Gallagher (facebook)

Notes

As part of the consultation we split into groups to discuss.
These are the notes from group discussions:

Group 1

Preservation of natural woodland
Charcoal burning business
Tree top trails
Log buildings and huts for holiday makers
Forest School building
Trees that soak up carbon
wood fuels business
Protect wildlife
Photography
Tourism
Access to native woodland with information panels
Bird hides
Close proximity to the village
Woodland burial site (near standing stone?)
Greater biodiversity

Group 2

Social Enterprise

- Wood pellets
- Firewood
- Export for reinvestment
- Not for profit company where excess profits are reinvested locally e.g. into Achnaha woods.

Money from forest in Morvern

- Local people employed
- Apprenticeships
- link with: Agricultural colleges so that young people get qualifications in forestry/ecology

Diversification of crop e.g. Douglas fir etc which may be more profitable.

Plots for local people.

Does it just have to be Forestry Commission land?

Things we want to know more about

Value of business e.g. Profits
Existing contracts
Leverage with government for community ownership/investment
Land reform/management

Group 3

A diverse woodland where lots of aspects of land use are interlinked

Accessibility

- Paths
- open spaces
- patchwork of different trees/uses of forest land

Affordable Housing

- Crofts
- self build plots
- Creating a sense of belonging

Commercial viability

- non-monoculture
- sustainability
- Different types of timber trees
- non timber trees e.g. fruit, nut, medicinal trees
- very long term plan needed

Natural Heritage

- Opportunity to appreciate local beauty
- Regeneration of native woodland
- Archaeology
- Historic sites

Jobs

- Sustainable
- Training and education
- Variety of jobs
- Year round
- skilled
- semi-skilled
- unskilled
- Livestock

Scale?

- not certain at this stage
- commercial ethos
- capacity of volunteers?